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FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN:
IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTION
IN THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

Austria*, Bangladesh*, Bolivia, Canada*, Chile, Costa Rica,* Côte d'Ivoire*, Dominican Republic, Ecuador*, El Salvador*, Ethiopia, Guatemala*, Israel*, Mali, Morocco, Panama*, Paraguay, Philippines, Spain* and United States of America: draft resolution

Older women and support systems: gender and caregiving

The Commission on the Status of Women,

Aware that gender difference in life expectancy rises with age and that, therefore, two thirds of the very old are women,

Also aware that, traditionally, women are relied upon as caregivers at all ages and that they make an essential but often unrecognized and unremunerated contribution to society and the economy,

Taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on older women and support systems,[1] based on the report and recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Caregiving and Older Persons: Gender Dimensions, which underscored that:

* In accordance with rule 69 of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council.

[1] E/CN.6/1998/4.

(a) Changes in the traditional support systems affect women and men differently;

(b) Urbanization has weakened the traditional support systems for older persons;

(c) There are growing numbers of women, who are the primary caretakers, entering the labour market;

(d) Because women live longer than men, they are more likely than men to live alone in old age; in most countries, widows outnumber widowers;

(e) Older women are more likely than men to be poor;

(f) Older women face a higher risk of chronic illness and disability; female advantage in life expectancy is often offset by disability;

(g) Older women's contributions to the well-being of their families, communities and the economy are widely overlooked,

1. Takes note of the recommendations made in the report of the Secretary-General;

2. Invites Member States to consider implementing, at the national level, as appropriate, the recommendations contained in the annex below, which are based on the Secretary-General's report and the views expressed in the Commission by member States;

3. Requests the Secretary-General to take into account these recommendations when preparing his report to the Commission at its forty-third session, as requested in its resolution 41/2.

Annex

RECOMMENDATIONS ON CAREGIVING AND OLDER PERSONS: GENDER DIMENSIONS

A. Research

So far, there is a lack of expertise and research on support systems for older persons from a gender perspective. National and international statistical and research institutes should:

(a) Disaggregate all data by age and sex;

(b) Analyse the needs of older persons and caregivers from a gender perspective;

(c) Pay special attention to the situation of older women and men in developing countries and carry out research on how support systems affect women and men differently;

(d) Analyse the consequences of changes in pensions and health care based on gender and age;

(e) Develop a methodology to measure the value of women's unpaid labour.

B. Economic security

Women in all parts of the world are more likely than men to be poor. Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions should:

(a) Ensure that women at all stages of life have access to employment, social protection systems and income equal to that of men;

(b) Value the important contributions older women make to development;

(c) See that particular attention is paid to efforts to eliminate the gender gap in income;

(d) Eliminate discrimination against women in pension funds that are based on the principle of continuous employment;

(e) Ensure that older women have access to credit and income-earning possibilities;

(f) Equally involve men and women at all levels when designing and implementing economic policies that affect older persons.

C. Education and empowerment

The level of formal education and participation in public life of older women is much lower than that of men. Governmental and intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions should:

(a) Ensure that throughout their lives, girls and women have equal access to education and vocational training, and promote women's self-esteem at all stages of life;

(b) Promote lifelong learning on the part of women, provide possibilities for training and retraining, and equip older women with knowledge of modern and traditional technologies so they remain in the mainstream of society;

(c) Promote a positive image of older women in political and economic decision-making through mass media and education in order to ensure older women's autonomy and productivity;

(d) Give special attention to the situation of older women in the context of the International Year of Older Persons (1999).

D. Well-being of caregivers

Women as caregivers are in demand. In order to support caregivers, Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions should:

(a) Attach higher value to unpaid caregiving labour and be aware that caregiving is not in unlimited supply;

(b) Ensure that the demand put upon women as caregivers does not increase disproportionately to that put upon men;

(c) Provide opportunities to caregivers for occasional respites from their duties and provide caregivers with various services, such as housekeeping help, self-help groups, specialized counselling and training;

(d) Promote an equal sharing and better reconciliation of working, employment and caregiving responsibilities between men and women;

(e) Consider providing financial assistance to informal caregivers;

(f) Support women and men who combine paid work and elder care with measures such as flexible working arrangements, family leave for the care of older dependent family members, and reintegration of caregivers after a career break;

(g) Offer a variety of alternative services to older people, such as home care and day-care centres.